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Discover Your Bible Series

Revised
Edition

Discover
EXODUS
SPECIAL DELIVERY

LEADER GUIDE



Part One of a Two-Part Study

LEADER GUIDE

Discover
EXODUS
SPECIAL DELIVERY




**FAITH
ALIVE.**
Christian Resources

Grand Rapids, Michigan

*“Go. I am sending you to Pharaoh
to bring my people the Israelites
out of Egypt.”*

Exodus 3:10

We thank Carol Veldman Rudie for writing the original lesson material (1997) on which this revised study of Exodus is based. This revised edition incorporates updates and suggestions by readers and small group leaders.

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To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader but not to substitute for your own work. As you prepare to lead each lesson, work first through the questions in the study guide. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage. Prepare thoroughly before leading each group session so that you can lead without frequent references to notes. This approach will free you to concentrate on leadership responsibilities, keep eye contact with group members, and listen carefully.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions into smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others to truth by questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Help to Apply

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do follow-up reflection at home.

Leadership Training

If more than one group in your setting is using this Bible study, we strongly encourage leaders to meet regularly for discussion of the lesson material, for prayer, and for mutual support.

If this study is being used in a Coffee Break Small Groups program, each leader should have a copy of the *Coffee Break Evangelism Manual with Director's Handbook*, a basic "how-to" guide for establishing and leading a Bible discovery group. Reread the book or portions of it periodically and review it at the beginning of each season.

Leaders will also find it helpful to attend a leadership training workshop in connection with small group ministry.

For more information,

- call toll-free 1-888-644-0814, e-mail smallgroups@crcna.org, or visit www.smallgroupministries.org
- call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit www.FaithAliveResources.org (to order materials)

Egypt and Sinai in Moses' Day



Introduction

The Exodus narrative is a continuation of the story begun in Genesis. Genesis tells about the origins of the universe and human history—and particularly about God’s work to make a new nation through which he will bless all peoples (Gen. 12:1-3). Exodus continues that story by showing how God proceeds to work out his plan, over many long years, to make that nation into his chosen people, from whom the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, would come (see Matt. 1).

Part One of this study focuses on the first fifteen chapters of Exodus, which make up one of the most memorable stories in the Bible. These chapters reveal the character of God and many of his attributes. They celebrate God as the deliverer of his people. The remaining chapters of Exodus (featured in Part Two of this study) then describe how God makes his people into a nation unlike any other—not for the purpose of being different, but ultimately to show God’s love to the world.

Taken as a whole, the narrative of Exodus mirrors the redemptive plan of God for his children, even today. It gives us a fascinating glimpse of God’s purpose throughout history—to provide a divine mediator, Jesus Christ, who frees people from slavery to sin and leads them into full life with God forever (John 8:34-36; 10:10).

Glossary of Terms

- Abraham**—father of the Israelite nation, called by God to leave his homeland and begin a family of people who would be faithful to the Lord and live in the land of Canaan. Abraham is renowned for his faith in God’s promises (Gen. 12:1-7; 15:6, 13-16; Heb. 11:8-16). He is also called “the father of all who believe” in Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:11).
- angel of the Lord**—a special agent from God who represents, brings a message from, and is sometimes identified with God.
- Canaanites**—the inhabitants of Canaan (see map), the land the Lord promised to give to Abraham and his descendants.
- circumcision**—removal of the male foreskin. God commanded Abraham and his descendants to do this as a sign that they belonged to God and as a symbol of the cutting away of sin from their lives (Gen. 17). In the New Testament circumcision is replaced with baptism in Christ. True circumcision is of the heart, not the flesh (Jer. 4:4; Col. 2:9-12).
- consecrate**—to set apart for holy purposes; to dedicate to God.
- covenant**—a mutually binding agreement between two parties; usually both parties agree to accept certain responsibilities.
- exodus**—exit, departure, literally “the road out” (from Greek, *ex + hodos*).
- fear of God**—To fear God means to respect and honor God with awe and humble devotion (see Ex. 1:17; 14:31).
- Goshen**—the land given to Jacob and his descendants (Israel) when they came to live in Egypt (see map; Gen. 47:1-12; Ex. 8:22; 9:26).
- Hebrew**—a general term for the descendants of Abraham, a descendant of Eber. The *NIV Study Bible* states that Eber “is the origin of the Hebrew word for ‘Hebrew’” (see Gen. 10:21, 25; 11:10-12:9) and that Egyptian and Canaanite correspondence from around 1375 B.C. (about 75 years after the exodus) refer to an ominous fear of people called “Habiru” (or “Apiru”), a word probably referring to the Hebrews.
- hyssop**—a bush with small, closely packed branches useful for sweeping or brushing (see Ex. 12:22).
- Isaac**—Abraham and Sarah’s son, who inherited all the promises God made with Abraham.
- Israel**—another name for Jacob (Ex. 1:1). Later the name is more commonly used to refer to the nation of Israel that descended from Jacob’s twelve sons.
- Jacob**—Isaac’s son whom God renamed Israel (Gen. 32:28). The descendants of Jacob’s twelve sons became the twelve tribes of the people of Israel.

Joseph—one of the twelve sons of Jacob. Sold into Egyptian slavery by his brothers, Joseph became an interpreter of dreams, helped Pharaoh, and became second in command of Egypt. During a severe famine he saved his entire family by moving them to Egypt, where there was food (Gen. 37-50). Joseph asked that, when he died, his bones be taken back to Canaan when the Israelites returned there (Gen. 50:25; Ex. 13:19).

Midian—desert region east of Egypt and south of Canaan, inhabited by nomadic shepherds (see map). The Midianites were descendants of Abraham through his wife Keturah (Gen. 25:1-4), whom he married after Sarah died (Gen. 23).

Moses—the man chosen by God to lead his people out of Egypt and as they lived in the wilderness before entering the promised land of Canaan. Moses received from God and taught Israel the laws that would govern them as God's chosen people.

Pharaoh—the title used by kings of Egypt. The Egyptians believed their kings were sons of their gods.

plunder—to take the goods of, usually by force (as in war).

redeem—to buy back; to deliver or set free through a ransom payment or other provision. The firstborn sons of the Israelites were redeemed from the plague of death in Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:1-13, 21-23; 13:12-16). The Passover pointed to redemption from spiritual death, paid by the blood of Jesus Christ through his death on the cross for all who believe in him as Savior, the one who delivers us from our slavery to sin (John 8:34-36).

spelt—a grain similar to wheat (Ex. 9:32).

vigil (keep vigil)—to keep watch or guard (see Ex. 12:42).

Lesson 1

Exodus 1

Israel in Egypt

Introductory Notes

As the book of Exodus opens, we find the people of Israel in Egypt. They have lived there already for many years—long enough for their population to multiply and become noticeable to the Egyptians. The story of how they came to Egypt is presented in the preceding book of Genesis (see Gen. 37-50).

In Exodus we find the continuing story of how God made a new nation, descended from Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 12-25), and blessed them in order to bless all the other nations on earth (Gen. 12:2-3). Much later in the story we learn how God accomplished that through Jesus Christ, who became a descendant of Abraham and was also the Son of God (Matt. 1; Luke 1:26-38). He came to deliver us all from slavery to sin (John 8:34-36) and to give us new life with God forever (John 5:24; 10:10).

As you study the book of Exodus, you'll discover many parallels to God's saving work through Jesus. God's plan to deliver his people Israel mirrors his much greater plan to save us all. In this first chapter of Exodus, for example, look for clues about God's care for Israel even as they encounter very hard times.

Optional Share Question

Note: The optional share question in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session or at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt each share question in a way that works best for your group.

How do you handle times of testing and struggle? How do you hold up under pressure?

1. Exodus 1:1-5

As the book begins, what do we learn about the descendants of Israel?

From its very first words, Exodus continues the narrative of Genesis. The original Hebrew-language text begins the book of Exodus with the word for "And." Some group members may even have a translation that begins Exodus with "And . . ." (for example, see the Berkeley

Version). Exodus continues the story of Abraham’s grandson Jacob (Israel—see Gen. 32:28; 35:10) and his family after their move to Egypt (see Gen. 45-50).

- **Why had Jacob and his family moved to Egypt? (See Gen. 46:1-5; 47:1-12.)**
- **Where was “home” for these people, and who had promised it to them? (See Gen. 12:1-12; 13:12-17; 50:22-25.)**

If your group has not studied Genesis before or is unfamiliar with the stories of God’s people Israel, you’ll want to summarize their history briefly.

- **Who are the people mentioned in Exodus 1:1-5, and what was significant about them?**

Israel was the name God gave to Jacob (Gen. 32:28; 35:10). The name *Israel* also refers to Jacob’s descendants, who multiplied into a large nation. Eleven of Jacob’s sons are listed in verses 2-4. Joseph, who was already living in Egypt, is noted in more detail in verses 6-8. Jacob’s sons were the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

2. *Exodus 1:6-10*

a. *What happened to the people while they lived in Egypt?*

b. *What did the new king fear? Why?*

- **Why might the writer emphasize the growth of Israel’s population? What promises did Israel’s growth fulfill?**

The nation of Israel developed at a rate that alarmed Pharaoh. At the same time, this growth revealed God’s blessing and faithfulness to his promises to Abraham (Gen. 15:5; 17:1-6), to Isaac (Gen. 26:4), and to Jacob (Gen. 28:13-19; 48:3-4). From a family of only seventy people (Ex. 1:5), their numbers increased dramatically, by God’s hand. By the time the book of Exodus begins, the Israelites have been in Egypt for more than two hundred years—and probably as many as three hundred (see Gen. 15:13-14; Ex. 7:7; 12:40-41; see also Acts 7).

- **What did the pharaoh of Egypt think of the Israelites? Why?**

To the pharaoh, or king, of Egypt in those days, Joseph and Israel “meant nothing” (Ex. 1:8). Several translations state here that he “knew

nothing” about Joseph, who had been a powerful ruler, second in command over Egypt during a time of great famine (Gen. 41:37-43). So it seems that Joseph’s reputation was no longer a part of the general knowledge of Egypt, or that the current pharaoh cared nothing about that history. Instead, to this king, Israel was merely a growing foreign population that could pose a military threat to Egypt. So he reacted according to political instincts. Because they lived in Goshen, between the Nile River delta and Egypt’s enemy neighbors (see map; see Gen. 47:1-6, 27; Ex. 8:22), the Israelites could easily side with those enemies in a conflict against Egypt.

Note for your group members that Egyptian pharaohs exercised ultimate control over their people. The king’s wishes became the law of the land. The pharaoh controlled both the governmental bureaucracy, which reinforced his power, and also the priests and the religious establishment. The king was considered by the people to be like a god, or a son of their gods.

- **What situations might this remind us about in our world today?**

Discuss the problems that political manipulation, prejudice against particular groups, and racism create in our world today. Many such sins are rooted in fear of the unfamiliar and a desire to gain or hold on to power over others.

3. *Exodus 1:11-14*

- What did the Egyptians do as a result of their new king’s assessment?*
- What were the effects on the Israelites?*

The Egyptians came up with a plan to control the Israelites. The use of forced labor was common in Egypt and throughout the ancient world.

- **What kind of work did the people have to do? How severe was the labor?**
- **What words in this passage describe the way the Israelites were treated by their Egyptian slave masters?**

The Israelites were pressed into incredibly hard labor. Egyptian officials became their slave masters and “worked them ruthlessly” (Ex. 1:13-14). Note that the two cities the Israelites built are known historic locations (see map).

- **What was the Egyptians’ attitude toward the Israelites?**
- **How effective was Pharaoh’s scheme against the Israelites? What were the goals in this treatment?**

No matter what Pharaoh ordered in terms of brutal labor, the people continued to multiply. As a result, “the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites” (1:12). Out of increased fear, the Egyptians made the lives of the Israelites “bitter” (1:14). To some degree, Pharaoh’s efforts were productive. The Israelite slaves got important work done. But Pharaoh could not achieve his main goal of keeping the Israelite population down.

4. *Exodus 1:15-16*

What did the king try next? Why would he do this?

Pharaoh saw that his scheme to limit the Israelite population was failing. So he tried a more direct approach. Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all the Israelites’ newborn baby boys.

- **Why would he kill boys?**

Pharaoh was driven by a fear that this slave population would eventually revolt and join Egypt’s enemies (1:10). So he likely figured he had to kill Israel’s future warriors.

In your discussion, you may wish to note that Shiphrah and Puah were most likely leaders or representatives of a large group of midwives.

In verse 15 we find the first occurrence of the term “Hebrew” in Exodus (see glossary). This term is used to identify the people of Israel, descended from Abraham, a descendant of Eber. The *NIV Study Bible* states that Eber “is the origin of the Hebrew word for ‘Hebrew’” (see Gen. 10:21, 25, 11:10-12:9) and that Egyptian and Canaanite correspondence from around 1375 B.C. (about 75 years after the exodus) refer to an ominous fear of people called “Habiru” (or “Apiru”), a word probably referring to the Hebrews.

If you have a variety of Bible translations available, you will notice there are a few different possibilities for the translation of “delivery stool” (Ex. 1:16); the Hebrew term here literally means “two stones” on which women sat to give birth.

5. *Exodus 1:17-19*

- How did the midwives respond to the king’s order? Why?*
- What did they say when the king questioned them? What do you think of their answer?*

- **What dilemma did the midwives face? What did they decide to do? Why?**

The midwives faced a difficult decision. They had regularly witnessed brutality by the Egyptians and their king. Now they had to choose between obeying the cruel king and obeying God, whom they feared (honored, respected, with awe) as Lord. Their fear of God helped to guide their decision to let the infant boys live.

- **What did the king do when he found out?**

The king called for the midwives and asked them to explain why they didn't carry out his orders.

- **What do you think of the midwives' answer? Why do you think they would answer this way?**

Notice the touch of humor here, in which the midwives are making up an almost laughable excuse to appease the king.

The situation, however, was gravely serious. As they tried to spare children's lives, the midwives' own lives were likely also in danger. The text doesn't explain why the king didn't punish them for not following his orders. The Lord must have been protecting them. The following lines of the narrative show that God approved of their actions (vv. 20-21).

- **Think of other circumstances in which people have used deception to obey God. Share an example or two.**

Though God calls us to honesty, there can be times when using deception may be necessary to protect others from monstrous harm. Telling a lie to save innocent lives in times of war or oppression is a clear example. Shiphrah and Puah's circumstances were similar.

- **What does this dilemma reveal about the helplessness of the Israelites and their complete dependence on God?**

6. *Exodus 1:20-21*

How did God respond to the midwives' actions and honor their obedience?

- **How did Israel benefit?**

These verses mark the first description of God's direct intervention in the action of the Exodus story. God showed kindness (favor, blessing)

to the midwives (1:20) and rewarded their obedience by giving them “families of their own” (1:21).

Of course, God had always been working behind the scenes to preserve and multiply his people (1:7), even (or perhaps especially) in their great distress (1:12). In this part of the story too, we see God’s work in making Israel “even more numerous” (1:20) through his protection and care for the midwives. So God’s blessing extended beyond the lives of the midwives to benefit all of Israel as well.

- **What examples do you see of God’s work in people’s lives that also brings benefits to others?**

7. *Exodus 1:22*

How did Pharaoh retaliate?

The story in Exodus 1 closes on a threatening note. The king of Egypt was not about to give up easily on his goal to assume control over Israel. Pharaoh responded to the midwives’ actions by stepping up his terror tactics. He now ordered “all his people” to get involved in killing infant Hebrew boys.

This situation may remind some group members of a massacre ordered by King Herod when Jesus was a baby. When Herod learned that a new king had been born in Bethlehem, he ordered that “all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under” were to be killed (Matt. 2:16).

Events like these illustrate that in this world there is always a power struggle in which the forces of evil (often working through human sin and corrupt power structures) try to stop the work of God and his plans to bring salvation. But God cannot be stopped. Though evil can sometimes inflict great harm, it is no match for the almighty power of God.

- **Why would God allow such hardship and suffering?**

We may wonder why God would allow evil to bring so much suffering at times, and there are no easy answers to that question. We must also admit that we cannot fully understand God’s purposes (Isa. 55:6-11). In addition, we are called to trust that God is good and will keep his promises. The stories of the Old Testament show clearly that God is more than faithful as he keeps his promises, even when his people don’t deserve his favor (see also Rom. 5:8, 10). And when God’s people go through suffering, the Lord is always with them, even though they may not realize it (Isa. 43:1-2; see Ps. 66:10-12).

As we will see in the continuing narrative of Exodus, God acts mightily to deliver his people and bless them, and we know today that God has done that ultimately by bringing Jesus Christ into the world to suffer on our behalf, to deliver all who believe in him from the powers of sin and evil (John 3:16; 8:34-36). Evil may be powerful, but the Lord is almighty (John 10:27-30), and God will keep his promises to bring us to live with him forever (John 14:1-3; Rev. 21-22).

- **How did Pharaoh's tactics become increasingly heartless?**

Note together the progression of Pharaoh's schemes to try to control Israel and their population growth. First he pressed them into forced labor (1:11), and then into harsh labor, working them ruthlessly (1:14). Then Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the Israelites' baby boys. When that plan didn't work, Pharaoh ordered the people of Egypt to drown "every Hebrew boy that [was] born" (1:22) by throwing them into the Nile River.

In Exodus 2, however, there are glimmers of hope in this sad story. As we will discover in our next lesson, God continued working to keep his promises, and Pharaoh was powerless to stop him.

Questions for Reflection

Which powers are in opposition in Exodus 1? Do you see evidence of those powers at work in our world today? Explain.

In this chapter what do we learn about the power of God working behind the scenes? What examples can you give of God's work behind the scenes in your life? How can you share those examples with other people in your life?

As you reflect on this lesson material, note together that the focus of Exodus 1 is very much on human power. But we can see the power of God at work behind the scenes—and even in the direct action in Exodus 1:20-21. In later chapters we will see many examples of God's direct intervention on the part of his people.

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